ISTITUTO ITALIANO PER GLI STUDI FILOSOFICI

HEMSTERHUIS: A EUROPEAN PHILOSOPHER REDISCOVERED

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Claudia Melica

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PETER C. SONDEREN

PASSIONS AND PURITY. FROM SCIENCE TO ART: DESCARTES, SPINOZA AND HEMSTERHUIS

1. *The end and its beginning*

In the view of many scholars the beginning of the new millennium is also the final end of an extraordinary period of time. With the start of Postmodernism in the eighties of the last century a historical period called "Modernism" had come to its end. In this vision "Modernism" is the real birthplace of the modern subject. The delivery of this new theoretical phenomenon took place at the end of the eighteenth century, a dark and cloudy period in which two significant era's changed roles. Something similar seems to be happening now. Postmodernism creates its own beginnings by putting an end to, or absorb, its ancestor. How this takes place is not the subject of this paper. On the contrary, its focus is directed at the very heart of Modernism – that heterogeneous episode that knew so many starts, at so many different places, and in so many circumstances.

To shed some light on the darkness of one of "the many *Enlightenments*", I should like to draw the attention to one aspect of culture that has proved to have an intimate rapport to the change of cultural opinion: *the visual arts*. Art always, in both Modernism and Postmodernism, gives cultural change a face. Whatever work of art you look at, it always shows us some

facet that draws us back into time. This can be a historical time, a past time, a time to pass by, a play in time, or even "frozen time". A work of art at all times displays its date of birth either by trying to withdraw from any "recognizability" in its search for universality, or by implicitly showing its historical identity. Some of Mondrian's paintings, for instance, draw our attention to some indistinct metaphysical eternals that are represented, or may be better, *presented* by a few horizontal and vertical lines. Their uncomplicated figures provide the viewer with the impression of being directly immersed into Platonic forms. Besides this, they also give us a look at the future by pointing at history's finality. In other words, art shows us the way we have to go. This belief in art, as a teleological means, was a very long time the basis of modern art. Art was therefore Modernism's loyal partnerform the very start. In the new millennium this cooperation is much looser. The idea of progress that was the layer of art seems to have lost its vigour and its power.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth century progress, as a moving force, was not unknown. On the contrary, the idea gained quite an important status. One of its most favourite – or at least better known – seats were the discussions on the differences in art and science, that had become widely known as the *querelle des anciens et modernes*. This international debate on the difference in quality between modern and ancient knowledge and art had made progress an important critical and decisive tool. Did ancient sculpture, for instance, already represent the summit in art or was it still possible to surpass it? Did modern knowledge on the laws of nature not have a superior status in comparison to all those witty ideas that ancient scholars forged in their writings? Could we not see much further and sharper than all those old peoples that not even wore glasses?

With regard to art it seems that this discussion finally led, at least in the eighteenth century, to the victory of those who favoured the ancient attitude. Greek art became the *non plus ultra* of human skills. With the arrival of Winckelmann's and Hemsterhuis's aesthetics this development seemed to be finally

concluded. This might be true with regard to Winckelmann, but the same can not be said, however, about Hemsterhuis. His theory is not an endpoint of the cyclic and regressive opinion that started in the seventeenth century, but should be viewed as an important theoretical contribution to the process that finally led to the emergence of modern art around 1800. In this development classical art played an important role as a moving force. The course of this energy was no more directed at the past but at the future. Art became part of the force of progress by divesting the old clothes of antiquity.

2. *Science and art*

To make this development towards the modernisation of art visible it is useful to compare two sets of images, namely Charles Le Brun's influential versions in his *Sur l'expression générale et particulière* (1698)[1] and Humbert de Superville's drawings of human passions in his *Essai sur les signes inconditionnels dans l'art* (1827-1839)[2]. Both deal with the representation of inner human qualities. Le Brun displays seventeenth century passions and Humbert de Superville shows us their early nineteenth century version. In art historical terms we could name them *Baroque* versus *Neo-classical*. Le Brun's image of *Tristesse et abattement de cœur*, for instance, demonstrates a sad face in which the eyebrow plays a significant role[3]. In Humbert's version we are only left with four angular abstract lines in a downward direction. In the latter case, emotion seems to be completely depersonalised and formalised. The difference between Le Brun and Humbert should be summed up, as we shall see, as the

[1] C. Le Brun, *Sur l'expression générale et particulière*, Amsterdam-Paris 1698.
[2] D. P. G. Humbert de Superville, *Essai sur les signes inconditionnels dans l'art*, Leyde 1827-39.
[3] C. Le Brun, *Tristesse*, in Id., *Sur l'expression générale et particulière*, cit., p. 282.

dissimilarity between art that tries to fulfil particular scientific demands, and art that strives to develop its own self-proclaimed essence.

Le Brun's *Sur l'expression générale et particulière* was both written and drawn as a response to the Cartesian demand to develop a strict demarcation of all domains of knowledge, including the visual arts[4]. Descartes wrote his *Les passions de l'âme* in 1649[5]. In his view only six simple and primitive passions really exist: admiration, love, hate, desire, joy and sorrow. All other passions had to be seen as variations or compositions of these basic ones. Passions are *passive*, that is to say, they are not caused by the soul but by the body. Our soul is touched and moved by them. Because of the indistinct, corporeal origin and therefore unclear quality, Descartes called them *unreasonable*. He was, consequently, very well aware that passions played an important role in human daily life. In order to compete with their huge and therefore dangerous power it was absolutely necessary to have a sound knowledge of their workings. As a result passions had become the object of serious research, despite their low status. Reason had to know exactly what it had to oppose[6].

The *negative* or *pejorative* attitude towards passions implied a serious, unwanted threat to the visual arts. History-painting was considered to be the highest genre in painting. Its subject-matter originated from biblical and classical sources, which consequently – or at least mostly – lead to the display of human actions and passions. The depreciation of the passions therefore caused a considerable problem. The solution of this dilem-

[4] See J. MONTAGU, *The Expression of the Passions. The Origin and Influence of Charles le Brun's Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière*, New Haven-London 1994.

[5] R. DESCARTES, *Les passions de l'âme*, article LXIX, in *AT*, XI, 380.

[6] In the following I have used, in many instances, the excellent study on the role of passions in the eighteenth century: T. KIRCHNER, *L'expression des passions. Ausdruck als Darstellungsproblem in der französischen Kunst und Kunsttheorie des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts*, Mainz 1991.

ma was finally solved by Le Brun. He invented in his book a "rationalistic" grid in which every passion could find its proper place. In his graphical system the six basic passions found their visual translation. They were not ordinary passions, however, in their rough form taken directly from daily life, but quite the opposite: they were thought of and displayed as they ought to be. Le Brun's graphical representations – in which the eyebrow is the most significant feature – showed the most salient signs that he associated with every passion in particular.

Le Brun's system was a perfect answer to the rationalistic demand for systematic clarity in science. Nature was shown not in its uncertain state but as it ought to be. By way of scientific, i.e. rational certainty art could from now on be produced on a firm theoretical basis. Artists could consequently rely on a clear, academic system to paint their scenes from antiquity and the Bible. Le Brun's method inevitably became very powerful. Until the first half of the nineteenth century every artist and theorist could not escape the strength of its visual simplicity. There were, however, many reactions – positive and negative – to his graphic network. One of the first opponents was another influential art theorist, Roger de Piles, who, in his *Cours de peinture par principe* of 1668, protested both against Le Brun's overall minimalism and Descartes's too weighty definitions: artists were by no means philosophers[7]. For them it was enough to know that passions were movements of our soul, that could be moved to certain emotions in viewing a certain object – before reason even could interfere. As a consequence De Piles distinguished two different groups of passions: the pathetic one causes heavy emotions; the moral one communicate calm.

Another reaction to the scientific approach of "artistic" passions was the invocation of the imagination. This implied a growing attentiveness on the different effects that passions caused in the mind and body of the artist himself. The Dutch painter Gerard de Lairesse, for instance, suggested in his widely

[7] R. DE PILES, *Cours de peinture par principe*, Amsterdam and Leipsick 1766[2].

read *Groot Schilderboek* of 1707, to employ the mirror to express all passions that had to be used for a certain action in order to study its effects on the body. This procedure – in which an artist had to try to imagine «once his brains were cleared of any idea», how a certain passion really looked like in his own body – led to a more realistic expression of human emotions[8]. Le Brun's "emoticons", however, but also the impeccable exemplarity of various famous paintings kept their guiding strength[9].

In the course of the eighteenth century attention shifted gradually to a *psychological* interest. Parallel to the empirical pursuit of experience, instead of a rationalistic deduction in the natural sciences, art theorists became interested in the world of the perceiver. They move their attention from the art object to the domain that seems to have had no real proper identity before the eighteenth century: the existence of the observer. An important step towards this new phenomenon took Dubos, who had cut, in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture,* the strong Cartesian bond of passion and reason[10]. Unlike Le Brun and other Cartesian theorists reception and production of art were no longer regarded to be the same, that is to say, reception should no longer be identified with the domain of production. Instead of reason as the fundament of the judgement on art, feeling – or experience in general – had become a founded alternative. Not the personal feeling of the artist, but the response of the observer became the central concern of the theory. Art moved into the field of experience.

[8] G. de Lairesse had written that the procedure of imagining passions in the artist's body should take place in the early morning when the brains have been cleared of any idea and when there is solitude. See G. DE LAIRESSE, *Groot Schilderboek, waar in de schilderkonst in al haar deelen grondig werd onderweezen, ook door Redeneeringen en Prentverbeeldingen verklaard; met voorbeelden uit de beste Konststukken der Oude en Nieuwe Puikschilderen bevestigd: En derzelver Wel en Misstand aangeweezen* [...], Haarlem 1740², p. 50.

[9] See John Singleton Copley's famous *Watson and the Shark* of 1778 (Museum of Fine Arts, Boston), in which the face of the old man at the foreground is directly based on Le Brun's *Etonnement avec frayeur.*

[10] J.-B. DUBOS, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, Utrecht 1732².

This shift in domains coincides with the origination of the first public art shows (*salons*) – and of their immediate companion: art criticism. These new phenomena are all signs of the emerging "experience- society". In this new constellation it became clear that passions could play an important – *positive* – role, for they could provide the public with a weapon against its greatest fear: inertia or boredom. This finally led to a revaluation of the display of passions in art. The renewed task of the painter was, in Dubos's view for instance, to imitate human actions. They would give the new observer the necessary stimuli. Passions became therefore instrumental in both art and society.

The main task of the artist was to imitate real passions. Poets and painters had to arouse by their "artificial passions" real passions in the observer. Basic to this idea was the necessity to provide the observer with the same feeling or ideas as the artist had felt in his encounter with the original subject. Consequently, it was important to concentrate more on the illusion of the feeling than on the exact i.e. "scientific sound" depiction of the passion. Due to the emerging empirical psychology theorists, after Dubos became gradually more interested in the emotional content of passions. As a result the system of passions became more sophisticated.

In addition to the psychological concern another scientific branch became attracted to the emergence of passions: medical studies or medicine. James Parsons, for instance, had put in his *Human Physiognomy Explained* that muscles were «the true agents of every passion of the mind»[11]. This idea, that subsequently found its way into Diderot's *Encyclopaedia*, led to another shift in the discussions on passions and art. Medicine claimed by its anatomical emphasis – passions should be displayed ana-

[11] J. PARSONS, *Human Physiognomy Explained,* in ID., *The Crounian Lectures on Muscular Motion for the year 1746 read before the Royal Society*, in *Philosophical Transactions*, XLIV, 1747, part I.

tomically correct – the say on passions in art. This becomes very clear in the writings of Hemsterhuis's friend, the anatomist Petrus Camper. This latter was much involved with new founded academies of art, that suddenly appeared all over Europe in the second part of the eighteenth century. In his lectures for the *Amsterdamse Stadstekenacademie*, for instance, he showed, with the help of a piece of chalk on a blackboard, to his audience of artists and connoisseurs how passions should be depicted and drawn. In his view artists could not paint human emotions without a whole knowledge of the functioning of both bones and muscles and nerves[12]. By this demand of anatomical correctness science became dominant again. Art could only become *fine* art when it was produced in a scientifically convincing way.

In this physiological approach of passions there was no place reserved for psychological speculation. What is more, the emotional and corporal approach did not correspond because of its separate roots in Cartesian dualism. Only in anatomical pathology observations were made that hinted at the relation between psychological passions and physical diseases. This was later followed by the emergence of the science of man, anthropology. By making brains the psyche of man in his *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme* (1802), Pierre Cabanis, for instance, could place body and mind in the same perspective[13].

[12] Cf. P. CAMPER, *Redenvoeringen van wylen Petrus Camper, over de wyze, om de onderscheidene hartstogten op onze wezens te verbeelden* [...] *Gehouden in de Teken Academie te Amsterdam*, uitgegeeven door zynen zoon A. Gilles Camper, Utrecht 1792, p. 3 ff. Camper, who was a close friend of Hemsterhuis, deplores in this passage that Le Brun and his followers were only interested in a metaphysical approach of passions. They had paid no attention to the physical, i.e. to think in a truthful natural way. It is neither important to know how the soul functions, nor to know were it resides, for what we want to know is what goes on in the body when it is affected by extraordinary emotions; in all passions certain nerves are affected.

[13] P.-J. G. CABANIS, *Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, in ID., *Œuvres Philosophiques*, ed. par C. Lehec et J. Cazeneuve, Paris 1956, p. 105-631. See T. KIRCHNER, *L'expression des passions*, cit., pp. 335-8.

3. *Toward art without science*

In the process thus far described we should observe a constant tension between the demands of science and that what art could come up to. It moves from the depiction of strict archetypal rationalistic emotions to the exact, realistic, representation of the physiological way a passion finds and shows its way through the body.

The sophistication of passions in science was, however, not whole-heartly nor slavishly followed by artists. In the latter's view it was, for instance, impossible to express more than one passion at the same time, or to express simultaneously someone's race, geographical origin, social rank and education. Apart from this difficulty in representing the heterogeneity of man, however, another important argument came to the fore. The French artist Charles-Nicolas Cochin claimed that by the increase of civilisation and its related repression of passions it was virtually impossible for art to express genuine feelings or inner ideas. How could an artist represent someone's inner self when this person tries to hide this all the time?

We come across this same question also in Hemsterhuis's *Simon ou des facultés de l'âme*, which was written in the late seventies. Therefore, it is worthwhile to follow the latter's arguments, for this will open up the road that illuminates the final withdrawal of art from science. For what becomes apparent in the process just described is that art gradually abandons all of science's desires. Even though art had received a clear scientific order, with regard to the expression of the human subject, it gradually sought to get rid of its all too demanding terms. In the long-term art would not accept any law than its own. In this process Hemsterhuis's aesthetics plays a crucial role.

In Socrates's discussion with, among others, the sculptor Mnesarchos on the expression of passions in art, he claims, in the *Simon,* that «there are things in man that can not be expressed in any art, because they are in whatever way not sen-

sible from the outside»[14]. In art only depictions of young children are truthful, because their bodies reflect faithfully their inner receptivity for all kinds of external stimuli. Children are the only subject-matter in art in which «the interior and the exterior could express themselves equally»[15]. Moreover, for them the concept of fraud does not exist yet.

Hemsterhuis's argumentation is very interesting because he combines two fields: art and philosophical reflection. Although written dialogues or discussions between philosophers and artists are not at all uncommon in art theoretical treatises, his use of this literary form becomes fascinating. He not only makes sculpture the main subject of the conversation – most other treatises concern painting and poetry –, but he also enriches it by putting his psychological ideas in a mythological context. At the end of the dialogue he invokes the divine Diotima to reveal to the "historical" Socrates her ideas on the origin of the basic faculties of the human mind. In this exposé Hemsterhuis makes clear that passions as such never appear at the surface of someone's body but only their effects. The latter, however, do not have a one-to-one relationship to a specific passion, because anyone can hide his real feelings. The body thus can be a highly fraudulent place. Only young children and also just deceased people – the start and end of human life – show their real inner self, because fraud and ambiguous passions are absent[16].

It comes as no surprise therefore that already in his *Lettre sur la sculpture* of 1765 Hemsterhuis had chosen for the concentration on form instead of on the expression of passions – at

[14] *SA*, *WW*, 602 (554) : «il y a des choses dans l'homme, qui ne peuvent s'exprimer dans aucun art, par la raison qu'elles ne sont sensibles en aucune façon à l'extérieur». The latter not only applies for art but also for science.

[15] Ivi : «dans lequel l'intérieur et l'extérieur peuvent également s'exprimer».

[16] In order to paint *heroes* in art, Hemsterhuis advised artists to use dead and passionless bodies as model. Compare his remark with regard to the face of his just deceased father that he saw with «the most piquant voluptuousness» (*la plus piquante volupté*) cf. S-D, 4-4-1788, UBM, Bd. V (*Nachlaß*, Bd. X), pp. 581-84.

least in sculpture. He still acknowledges the importance of displaying passions and actions in art, but he also discovered another more important *modern* aspect of the work of art: its capacity to unite two different fields into one *moral* form. In his view visible passions in a sculpture necessarily spoil the fluent total outline of the figure. This makes an immediate unification from the observer with the image more difficult. And this is precisely Hemsterhuis's prerequisite of a good work of art: an image should absorb its perceiver at once, without bothering him too much with all kinds of non-artistic, i.e. literary content[17]. Form seems to become moral, because it alone fulfils man's desire. Hemsterhuis's fixation on "speedy" forms – and therefore on the elimination or dissolution of real physical time –, leads finally to an emancipation of artistic form, that becomes independent from literary content and, consequently, from passions. The true source of the need to show passions was after all *literary* and non-artistic. The turn towards (moral) form can be seen also in the growing artistic and art theoretical interest in other, more abstract qualities in classical art. Especially sculpture plays a major role in this resetting of norms and forms.

That the art of sculpture becomes central is related to the emergence of this art as the most important reference-point in art theory. This appears not only from Winckelmann's books, but also, and even more radical, from Hemsterhuis's works, above all his *Lettre sur la sculpture*. Even for painting sculpture becomes the central point of reference. Neo-classical painters like Jacques-Louis David, and later Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, were strongly motivated to approach their subject-matter in a sculpture-like way. Typical of David's early, revolutionary paintings, such as his famous *Serment des Horaces* (*the Oath*), seems their direct reliance on classical art. David's concentration on straight sculptural outline in a frieze-like frame is, however, only one aspect that points at the definitive withdrawal in

[17] Cf. MICHAEL FRIED's concept of "absorption" in his *Absorption and Theatricality, Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, Chicago-London 1980.

art from baroque illusionism. For what really strikes in his *Oath* is the absolute refrain from the expression of any passion, despite the passionate subject-matter. None of the men shows any sign of emotion. The women, on the other hand, display some vague sentiment, but no clear-cut emotion. The reliance on a sculptural approach is, therefore, directly related to the diminishing of the display of passion.

For this *sculptural turn* in Western painting, – that ultimately laid the foundation of modern art – Hemsterhuis's theory of visual reduction of non-artistic matter is crucial. It not only clarifies its emergence but it also forms its main theoretical framework. There is no theorist in the second half of the eighteenth century who is clearer about this point. Winckelmann is only of little help, for his aesthetics are still based on a baroque vision of painting and sculpture in which passions play an important role.

By depreciating passions – or better: by showing their incredibility and their inaptitude for sculptural art, Hemsterhuis opens up the road to the visual reduction of form. Although subject-matter as such never disappears until the arrival of the "historical" abstract art, there is a strong tendency to concentrate more on the artistic language itself than on a correct translation of the spoken or written word. The fascination for the fluent outline – used as a graphic mark or as a real contour of a fleshy body – is a clear sign of this development. Hemsterhuis's works and even his own drawings and sculptures reflect this general tendency towards stylistic abstraction that became one of the basic ingredients of modern art[18].

Hemsterhuis's scientific experiments with form show how the classical image is being reduced to a pure *perceptional* matter. The use of drawings of simple vases to demonstrate basic

[18] With abstraction I mean the growing awareness of form apart from content. This step was necessary for Romantics for a reconciliation of form and content. This pursuit is one of the main "problems" of Modernism.

perceptual visual modes is very clear at this point. His reducing of the aesthetic value of classical beauty to a matter of visual speed is radical if not revolutionary, although this can only be fully appreciated in the wider context of the development of art. August Schlegel, for instance, is the perfect witness of Hemsterhuis's contribution to the emerging, abstracting tendency in art, and to seeing classical art as a phase that can not be regained again[19].

4. *Uniting art*

Hemsterhuis's aesthetical search for purity is, however, one side of the coin. The metaphysical desire for formal simplicity is the other. This becomes clear when we consider both the *Lettre sur la sculpture* and the *Lettre sur les désirs*, which Hemsterhuis, as he wrote in one of his letters, saw as complementary works, the latter being incomprehensible without the former[20]. Hemsterhuis's experiment with visual forms in the *Lettre sur la sculpture* uncovered hidden human desires, whose origin he worked out in the *Lettre sur les désirs*. This conception became summarised in the succinct definition of aesthetic desire. The soul longs for unification with all objects outside itself in the quickest and richest way. This mechanism becomes especially visible when regarding art objects. The art object as object becomes the vehicle with which basic essences of the human mind can be made visible. Every beautiful art object fulfils the desire to unification, that is to say, up to a certain level. It

[19] Cf. A. W. SCHLEGEL, *Über Zeichnungen zur Gedichten und John Flaxman's Umrisse*, in *Athenaeum,* Berlin 1799, (reprint of the orig. ed. 1798-1800, Stuttgart 1960), pp. 193-247; and his remarks on Hemsterhuis's view on historical development in his *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst* (1801-1804), in *A. W. Schlegel Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*, hrsg. von E. Behler und F. Jolles, Paderborn 1989, vol. I, pp. 197 ff.

[20] Cf. S-D, 28-12-1780, KBH, 132 F 1; S-D, 5-6-1780, KBH, 132 F 1.

depends on the fluidity of form and the richness of visual ideas. In this constellation subject-matter is of minor importance. It goes without saying that the human body – also in Hemsterhuis's self-drawn "experimental" vases – is the subject of art. It is, however, human beauty at rest; beauty without any explicit passion. It is form that can be internalised in less than a second of time. The art object, such as a drawn sketch or a serpentine-shaped sculpture in the round, becomes the visual symbol of metaphysical desire materialised[21].

It is important to realise that prior to Hemsterhuis's works, art theory was mainly focussed on literary content. Even the much-praised group of *Laocoön* is only discussed in terms of the artistic translation of its subject-matter. Hemsterhuis regarded this statue, which is still considered as a masterpiece in sculpture, as a painting because of its passion-caused distortions and its one-sidedness. It lacks the total ideal presence of a real sculpture. A genuine sculpture embraces the perceiver by its prompt full presence and its seductive many-sidedness. Hemsterhuis's formalistic and radical approach makes that the *Laocoön* is displaced to another form of art, that is to say, to painting. This remarkable displacement is only thinkable when a straight formal approach is followed. Only an eye that has become focussed on the border or contour of whatever image is capable to discover or see the formal – abstract – qualities of an art form. This means that the bond of form and content becomes loose. Form can be considered in its own right. Form can become, as is the case with Hemsterhuis, even moral.

The art object becomes, therefore, the locus and focus-point of Hemsterhuis's search for the fundamentals of human desires. Within the total range of ways to fulfil human desires the art object is placed under the immaterial (human and divine) love, because of its materiality (*Lettre sur les désirs*). Many scholars

[21] In Hemsterhuis's view passions were no longer undesirable because of reason's demand but because they hindered love: they obstructed man's desire for unification.

interpret this means as a complete depreciation of art. This, however, makes no sense, because it is exactly the other way round. Art gets an important, not to say a decisive, place because of its position between the strict material world and the world of the mind. That is why Hemsterhuis is caught by art repeatedly. Art is able to visualise metaphysical processes and is no longer only a provider or translator of literary messages. Its new message seems to be: «devour me with your eyes – in no time – and you'll like it». That Hemsterhuis immediately acknowledges that this sensation of beauty finally leads to *disgust* – because of the incapability of an art-work to offer a real unification – makes his commitment to the power of art not less strong. In other words, art and beauty have become a worthy subject for philosophical reflection. Art has become instrumental in studying the human soul. Art makes our desire for unity immediately visible.

5. *Science into art*

The role that Hemsterhuis bestowed on art – its capacity to demonstrate, represent and explain beauty and its counterparts – gave to art an important philosophical legitimisation. By way of a modern empirical scientific method – he was the first to develop the first aesthetic experiment in history – Hemsterhuis moves art from the field of science into that of philosophy. Art becomes part of the philosophy.

In the Netherlands this approach was certainly new[22]. Baruch de Spinoza, Hemsterhuis's illustrious predecessor, never showed

[22] Hemsterhuis's experimental approach, his focus on sculpture, his ideas on perception, especially his ideas on time-based art, and so forth make his system quite unique. Scholars as: L. BRUMMEL, *Frans Hemsterhuis. Een philosofenleven*, Haarlem 1925; A. FUNDER *Die Ästhetik des Frans Hemsterhuis und ihre historischen Beziehungen, (mit einigen Zusätzen* von A. Dryoff), Bonn 1913 (see also his earlier, shorter study *Frans Hemsterhuis und die Ästhetik der Engländer und Franzosen im 18. Jahrhundert*, Bonn 1912); and quite recently A. P. DIERICK, *Pre-*

much interest in beauty and art. It is therefore quite surprising that his philosophical pantheism became so important to artists and (aesthetic) philosophers around 1800, especially in Germany. That Hemsterhuis is related to discussions on Spinoza's philosophy at the end of the century is well known. He plays – despite himself – even a small part in the so-called *Atheismusstreit,* which was going on between Jacobi, Mendelssohn and Lessing. One of the reasons for Hemsterhuis to avoid to get too much involved was that he already had played down Spinoza's system with his two first works, the *Lettre sur la sculpture* and *Lettre sur les désirs*. In one of his letters to Diotima he tells her that De Smeth, to whom both writings were dedicated, was an ardent Spinozist[23]. The dedication was not without reason – «non sans but», but was clearly meant to convert De Smeth to another, Hemsterhusian view of the world. He did not start his system, as Spinoza had done, with a geometrical definition of God, but he, instead, started with man. In Hemsterhuis's anthropological system God and man are permanently separated. In 1786 he writes: «Chez lui [Spinoza] la divinité est identifiée avec l'univers & chez moi la distance entre [ces] deux est infinie»[24]. Matter and mind do not coincide. Matter is moved by something else. Although man seeks for and desires unification with God and things, he will never succeed. This failure becomes perfectly visible in the art object – the locus of both desire and disgust. Seen in this perspective, Hemsterhuis's works can be seen as a firm aesthetical rejection of Spinoza[25].

Romantic Elements in the Aesthetic and Moral Theories of François Hemsterhuis (1721-1790), in C. INGRASSIA and J. RAVEL (eds.), *Studies in eighteenth century culture*, Baltimore-London 1998, vol. XXVI, pp. 247-71, are very good in cutting Hemsterhuis's ideas into pieces in order to show the origin of certain concepts. They hardly show, however, how he had put these ideas together in a new constellation, nor how this should or could be interpreted.

[23] Cf. S-D, 25-8-1786, UBM, Bd. IV (*Nachlaß*, Bd. IX), pp. 353-60.

[24] Cf. S-D, 11-4-1786, UBM, Bd. IV (*Nachlaß*, Bd. IX), pp. 139-46.

[25] Allow me to refer to my book P. C. SONDEREN, *Het sculpturale denken. De esthetica van Frans Hemsterhuis*, Leende 2000, p. 17 ff.

How can we explain that both Spinoza and Hemsterhuis became important philosophers for the changing aesthetic worldview around 1800? For some German philosophers, for instance, such as Schelling, the art object was the perfect medium to reconcile the (Kantian) separation between the moral and the natural world, because it could make infinity finite. It could show concepts without a literal conceptualisation. To understand this move it is no big step to look back at Hemsterhuis's ideas on moral form. To understand why an art-work was able to show the reconciliation of both spheres it is only a short distance towards Spinoza, to whom nature and God were one. Also the art object was thought of as displaying a simultaneous presence of causality and freedom.

If we consider, without going into detail, both opportunities, we could say that the interest in both Spinoza and Hemsterhuis reflects the split feeling of Romanticism, which should become an important underpinning of Modernism. Even Novalis, who on the basis of some important Hemsterhusian ideas on creative geniality, developed his system of poetical science or scientific poetry, can be interpreted in this way. His reconciliation of science and art, or the putting of both activities on the same basis, leans heavily on Hemsterhuis, who regarded the activity to produce art and science as one. That both Hemsterhuis's and Spinoza's ideas were taken out of their original context by these "modern" philosophers is of no importance. Just like Postmodernism absorbs many modernist features, the early beginnings of Modernism would absorb, not to say devour, their predecessors. Seen in this way the *modern* Spinoza and Hemsterhuis are *post-modern* from the very start. Both are in complete tune with their time and out of tune at the same time. That is why we still like to play with them, in the same way as Hemsterhuis and others liked to dispose of antiquity's outfit. Their *revision* of the essence of classical form would lead to a purist art – of which the work of the famous sculptor Antonio Canova is the perfect representative: his sculptures look very much like antiquity, but are in essence very modern. The lat-

ter's group of *Venus and Psyche* (1787-1793) seems, therefore, to be the perfect counterpart of Hemsterhuis's aesthetic demands and ideas expressed in the *Lettre sur la sculpture* and the *Lettre sur les désirs*. For also Hemsterhuis's neo-classical ideas are the birthplaces of the modern[26].

[26] See my recent essay: P. C. SONDEREN, *The return of beauty. Purity and the neo-classical foundation of modern art*, in C. INGRASSIA and J. RAVEL (eds.), *Studies in eighteenth century culture*, Baltimore-London 2004, vol. XXXIII, pp. 415-35.

MADDALENA MAZZOCUT-MIS

PASSION AND PERFECTION IN SIMON OU DES FACULTÉS DE L'ÂME

1. *The anatomy of the soul*

Studying Hemsterhuis's work *Simon ou des facultés de l'âme* it is possible to reconsider and analyse anew certain aspects of his aesthetics, that are not immediately evident when one first reads the *Lettre sur la sculpture*. These considerations reveal certain limitations intrinsic to the notion of "artistic representation", that is an "idea" conceived and, most importantly, reproduced in a sensible form.

It is evident from the analysis of the passions and from the role of faculties within the soul, that art can only aspire to a "second rate" perfection. Art, dominated by the senses and by the absolute despotism of vision, must submit itself to the existence of an area of irrepresentableness. Art, and sculpture in particular, can only reiterate the deception enacted by the exterior form of the human body, that conceals a further and quite hidden truth. The most innocent exterior may conceal the most wicked deception. In order to justify this assertion, Hemsterhuis, in *Simon ou des facultés de l'âme*, identifies a complex and intricate process whereby he reaches the conclusion that vice and virtue are not in a necessary reciprocal correspondence with men's actions and passions, which are simply the visible, often